

Maharlika

PINOY LIFE IN THE MARIANAS

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Saturday, April 15, 2006

La Greta

So much has been said and been written about Gretchen Barretto's backing out of the movie she was supposed to do with Bong Revilla. It would have been La Greta's comeback vehicle.

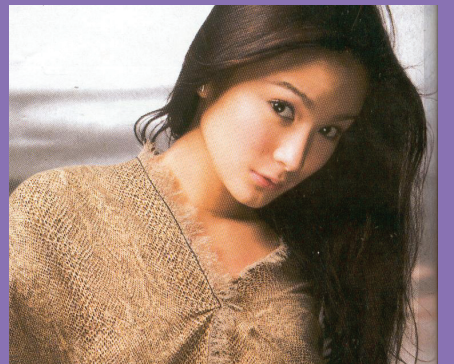
Page 5



Heart's Closet

Actress and commercial model Heart Evangelista's ultimate dream is to hold an art exhibit some day.

Page 6



Big Filipino crowd in Tapochau trek

A large number of Filipinos in the CNMI, probably a thousand of them or more, joined the annual Good Friday trek to Mt. Tapochau yesterday morning.

Likewise, many Filipino groups set up tents along the road to Tapochau to serve water and snacks to trekkers for free.

Some of the volunteer organizations were the Bicol Association, MDX Amateur Radio Club, MOVER, and Knights of Columbus, among others.

Aside from water, the Bicol Association put bread and peanut butter on the table, while MOVER offered hard-boiled eggs with salt on the side, to the delight of the hungry walkers.

Another popular station was that of the Knights of Columbus, which distributed free ice candies or ice keke to the hikers.

"Come, hurry so we can still get it [ice candy]," said one of the hikers to a friend on their way back from the mountain.

Others on the opposite lane also wondered where to get the thirst-reliever ice candy. "Just where are they [people] getting it?"

While yesterday's hike was primarily a religious sacrifice to many, others walked for the experience. Many of the participants were actually first-time Tapochau hikers.

A company executive who has been on island for 17 years said it was her time to actually walk up the mountain.

"It's for fun. It feels great but I don't think I'm doing it again soon. It's just hard to climb up and down," she said.

Ten-year-old Anne Madrid Angeles said she woke up at 5:30am to join the walk.

"I was the first in the house to wake up. I haven't been there [Tapochau] yet," she said.

BIG Page 2

Remittances jump to \$1.8B

Money remittances of overseas Filipino workers totaled \$1.8 billion in January and February, sustaining a double-digit growth rate of 14 percent from the same period last year despite a slowdown in the number of work-

ers going abroad, the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP, the central bank) said Wednesday.

In February, OFW remittances coursed through banks reached \$866 million, up 11.6 percent year-on-year despite a 10-percent decrease in number of land-based workers deployed

abroad to 134,436, the BSP said, citing preliminary figures from the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration.

Sea-based workers deployed in February increased 5.9 percent year-on-year to 41,595, it said.

REMITTANCES Page 2

AFP clears four generals

By DONA Z. PAZZIBUGAN
PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

The much-awaited military fact-finding report on the "Hello Garci" scandal has cleared three generals accused of conspiring to rig the 2004 elections in President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's favor. *See related story on Page 2.*

A fourth general with supposed links to the opposition was also absolved.

Navy chief Vice Admiral Mateo Mayuga, who headed the five-man fact-finding board, avoided media grilling by announcing the findings over a government television station last night.

The fact-finding body cleared Army chief Lieutenant General Hermogenes Esperon, Southern Command chief Lt. Gen. Gabriel Habacon and retired Lt. Gen.

AFP Page 2



TESS CASTRO

A hesitant leader rises up to the challenge

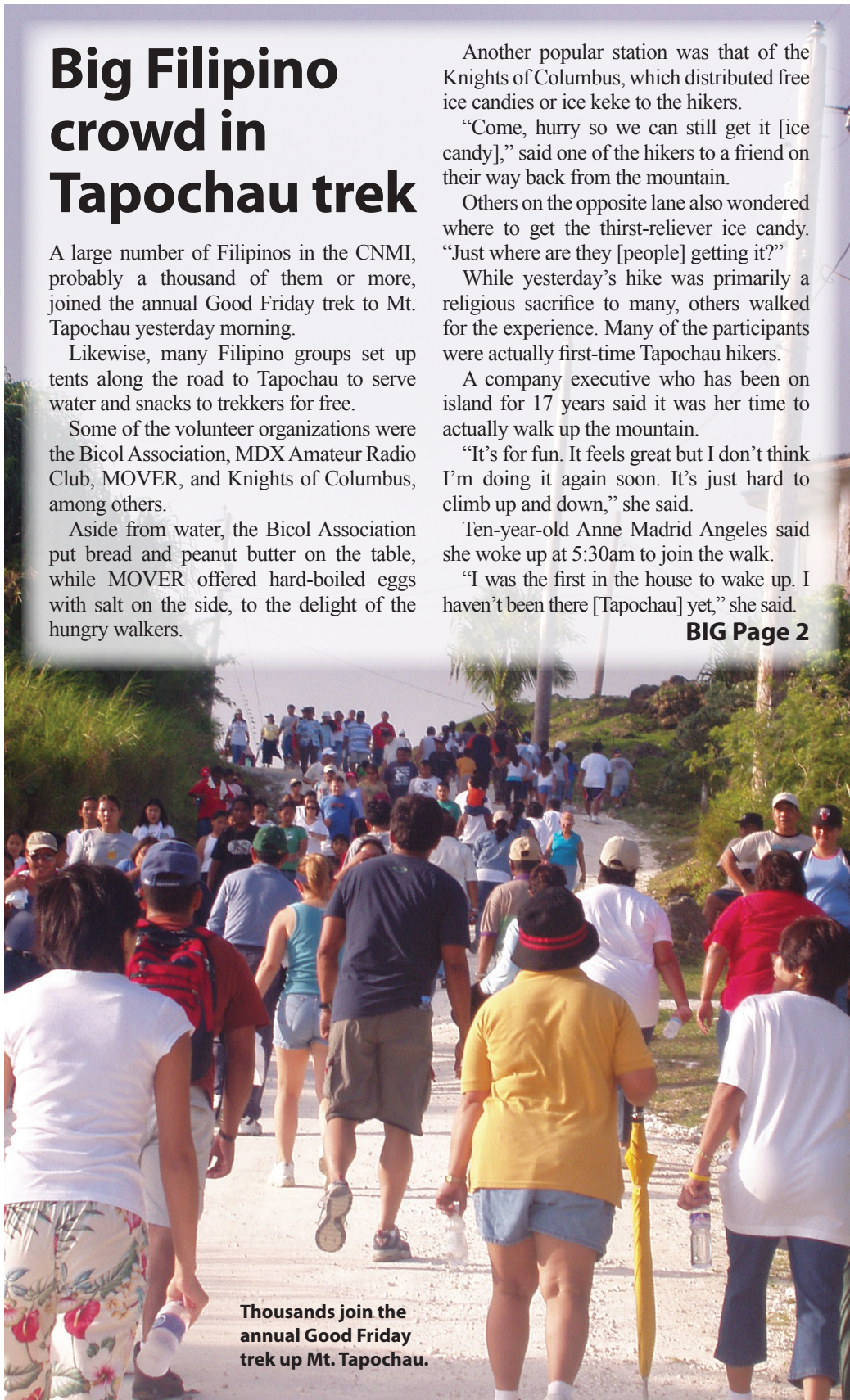
By AGNES E. DONATO
REPORTER

Many Commonwealth residents were surprised when the Marianas Visitors Authority board of directors decided to end Vicky Benavente's employment as MVA managing director in December 2005. But nobody more so than MVA chief accountant Ma. Teresa P. Castro, who suddenly found herself tasked with leading the islands' official tourism agency.

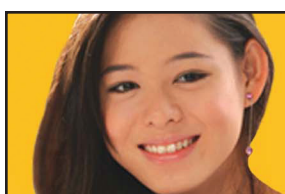
Having been handling MVA's finances for the past seven years, Castro knew that running the agency and selling the

TESS Page 2

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PINOYNEWS

'Too little, too late on Mayuga report'

By TJ BURGONIO, MICHAEL LIM
UBAC and LUIGE A. DEL PUERTO
PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

Opposition senators weren't a bit surprised by the report of a military fact-finding board that cleared three generals accused of helping President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo rig the 2004 presidential election.

An opposition congressman said it was a case of "too little, too late."

"What took Malacañang so long to authorize the release of the report [on the wiretapping scandal]? If it's correct that those generals are indeed innocent, withholding the

release for months was most unfair to them as they were left twisting in the wind during the interim," Parañaque Representative Roilo Golez said.

Senator Panfilo "Ping" Lacson said there was no reason to expect an honest report.

"Everybody is a hostage of the other -- from the Commander in Chief to the top military officials who got involved in election cheating and were the subject of the Mayuga investigation," Lacson said.

Senator Rodolfo Biazon said that as expected, the results of the investigation conducted by Vice Admiral Mateo Mayuga

only raised more questions than answers.

"It only proves that the AFP has not really been insulated from politics," Senator Jamby Madrigal said.

Lacson lamented that AFP Chief of Staff General Generoso Senga and Mayuga had failed to take advantage of their positions to thoroughly investigate the "Hello Garci" scandal that has been hounding the Arroyo administration since June last year.

The scandal revolves around purported wiretapped conversations between Ms Arroyo and former Election Commissioner Virgilio Garcillano in which

they allegedly conspired to rig the results of the May 2004 presidential election.

In one conversation, Ms Arroyo supposedly asked Garcillano to ensure a one-million vote lead over the late actor Fernando Poe Jr., the opposition coalition's standard-bearer.

The tapes mentioned Army chief Lieutenant General Hermogenes Esperon, Southern Command chief Lt. Gen. Gabriel Habacon and retired Lt. Gen. Roy Kyamko as supporters of Ms Arroyo.

Sanitized

Lacson said he was not ruling
TOO LITTLE Page 2

The BSP said the government was pursuing programs that would strengthen workers' technical training and education to enhance job-skills matching.

There are about eight million overseas Filipinos, equivalent to about 10 percent of the Philippine population, including three million who are permanent residents overseas. *With INQ7.net*

AFP

FROM PAGE 1

Roy Kyamko of allegations that they took part in cheating for Ms Arroyo.

Also cleared was retired Brigadier General Francisco Gudani, who was accused of being sympathetic to the opposition.

"On the four senior officers mentioned [in the "Hello Garci" tapes], not one of the witnesses testified on any direct knowledge whether or not they participated in any election fraud," Mayuga said on National Broadcasting Network-Channel 4 (NBN-4).

"Of the 70 resource persons interviewed, there was no mention of any direct evidence that will link these four gentlemen to any election fraud," he said.

Presidential Chief of Staff Michael Defensor preempted Mayuga's announcement when he told reporters in Baguio City that the report cleared the generals mentioned in the "Hello Garci" tapes.

Esperon was deputy chief of staff for operations [J3] and deputy commander of Task Force HOPE [Honest, Orderly

and Peaceful Elections] during the elections. He was named Army chief last August.

Habacon was commander of the 1st Infantry Division based in Sulu province while Kyamko was Southcom chief during the elections. Gudani was then the commander of the First Marine Brigade based in Marawi City.

Abu ordered probe

The probe started in late July, nearly two months after the purported conversations between Ms Arroyo and former Election Commissioner Virgilio Garcillano in which the two allegedly discussed ways to ensure her victory by at least a million votes became known.

The vote-rigging allegation sparked calls for Ms Arroyo's resignation.

Then AFP Chief of Staff General Efren Abu ordered the probe after a number of active officers led by former Scout Rangers chief Brigadier General Danilo Lim and Marine Colonel Ariel Querubin threatened to resign or go on mass leave unless the officials implicated in the "Hello Garci" scandal were investigated.

took pictures for about 30 minutes, and walked back down. They arrived at the parking area at about 10:30am.

"I thought it's easy to come down, but it's actually hard. It took us a longer time to return. My feet are hurting but it's okay," she said. (*Liberty Dones*)

BIG

FROM PAGE 1

She and her family parked their car at the Department of Commerce at about 7am and walked from there all the way up the mountain. They reached the top after an hour, rested and

TESS

FROM PAGE 1

islands as a tourist destination in these hard economic times would be tough. She took the job anyway.

"I am honored by the board's confidence in me," she says in an interview.

A native of the Philippine city of Caloocan, this reluctant leader has now served as acting MVA managing director for three months.

The job, as she expected, caused some headaches, what with all the VIPs she has to entertain, the vendors demanding payment, the employees she has to manage, the correspondences she has to maintain, and of course, the press people she has to deal with.

Fortunately, Castro says, she did not have a difficult time of getting herself familiar with MVA operations outside the accounting division. She relates that Benavente involved all MVA managers in the decision making process during her stint as head of the agency. "We knew what everybody else is doing," she says.

Castro also says that constant communication with the MVA board and the staff's support and cooperation make her job easier.

Although she is too modest to admit it, her dedication to her job obviously helps a lot, too.

Castro's position with the tourism agency is the longest one she has held in her nearly 20-year career. "I like this job. It's different from anything I've done before because it's not just an accounting job. It allows you to get out there to promote the islands, rather than limiting you to office work," she says.

Castro has a wide range of accounting experience, having worked for both private businesses and government in the Philippines and in the Northern Marianas.

She had her first formal job with the prestigious SGV and Co. accounting firm, immediately after she received certified public accountant status in 1989.

She also tried her hand at private practice before she came to Saipan to work as accountant for Niizeki International in 1990. After one year, she got a job as senior accountant at J.Scott Magliari accounting firm. She held the job for five years before she moved to Verizon.

Her first government job was with the NMI Retirement Fund, which she joined in 1997 and served for two years. She joined the MVA team in 1999. She became the agency's first recipient of the annual Leadership Award in 2004.

Castro, more commonly known as Tess, is married to Agustin Castro.

REMITTANCES

FROM PAGE 1

"The increased deployment of highly skilled, thus higher-paid, land-based workers such as engineers, teachers, ship and pilot/aircraft officers, production-related workers and service providers more than compensated for the decline in the total

number of deployed land-based workers," the BSP said.

The BSP attributed the increase in OFW remittances partly on commercial banks' expansion of services.

"Commercial banks ... heightened their marketing campaign by offering various 'telemoney' products and services—such as phone-banking, Internet/online banking and

bills payment services—specifically in Hong Kong, the United States, Italy, and the UK as well as strengthened tie-ups with foreign money transfer agents and non-bank channels," it said.

The major sources of OFW remittances were the United States, Saudi Arabia, Italy, Japan, Hong Kong, the United Kingdom, the United Arab Emirates and Singapore.



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OWWA-OFW SUPPORT GROUP

Ang gabay ng mga OFWs sa CNMI

By **MARCONI CALINDAS**
REPORTER

The OFW Advisory Council was formed in 2004 with the intention of supporting the overseas Filipino workers here in the CNMI, in collaboration with the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration of the Philippine Overseas Labor Office.

Planning Committee officer Dang Bernabe recalled that the group's main objectives then were: to plan and implement

common community projects and activities that would promote unity and foster friendship among the OFWs on Saipan and their adopted families and friends in the community.

"The volunteer group was formed in 2004 to support OWWA and POLO and, of course the Philippine Consulate with community activities in the CNMI, including health dissemination and special health projects," Bernabe said.

Other activities were as-

sistance to OFWs with labor cases through referrals and initial case evaluation. The council, said Bernabe, also established a legal fund treasury to be utilized as legal fees for specials cases. The group also helped OFWs who were terminated by their employers.

The OFW Advisory Council was also started with the purpose of assisting Philippine government offices in the CNMI in organizing and conducting seminars and train-

ings that would provide relevant information, impart knowledge and skills to OFWs.

Bernabe said the council started with over 32 charter members composed of several Filipino workers in the Commonwealth. There were five committees then: the Education Committee, Health Committee, Welfare Committee, Legal Affairs Committee and Culture and Sports Committee.

During its first year, the Advisory Council was behind

such activities as health screening programs and a paralegal seminar for FILCOM leaders on police matters, immigration laws and labor laws.

The group also coordinated the 2004 Independence Day celebration dubbed "Pistang Pinoy" and the Christmas Festival "Paskong Pinoy."

In 2005, the group decided to change its name to OWWA-OFW Support Group to make it more specific and true to its objectives, that is, "to provide assistance to the Filipino workers in the CNMI whether they have affiliations or without," said Bernabe.

To date, the OWWA-OFW Support Group has been active in the CNMI, recently spear-

heading the OFW Family Fun Day that was held last March at the American Memorial Park.

The group also provided assistance to the victims of the mudslide tragedy in Southern Leyte, collecting more than \$3,000 last month. The group remitted the money to the Philippine National Disaster Coordinating Council.

The OWWA-OFW Support Group also is active in sponsoring Filipino children so they could continue their schooling in the Philippines under the OWWA Tuloy Aral Project.

Bernabe said the group is currently active in visiting the OFWs barracks and dormitories to provide assistance.

LABOR FRONT

Complaint in foreign language

BY **FERDIE DE LA TORRE**
REPORTER

Q: Can a Filipino worker file a complaint before the Department of Labor in a Filipino language?

A: Any labor complaint should be filed in the English language. If written in Filipino or in another language, the complaint should be accompanied with an English translation and signed by the complainant or his attorney.

According to the Alien Labor Rules and Regulations, a complaint should contain the caption setting forth the name of the Division of Labor; the names and addresses of the parties; a short description of the nature of the complaint; and the relief requested or demanded.

The complaint may be handwritten, printed, or typed. Failure of the complaint to conform to any standard, regulation, or department policy or rule is not a valid ground for refusal of the complaint so long as it is legible and contains the needed information.

Q: How can a nonresident worker qualify to hire a domestic helper?

A: Nonresident workers who employ housemaids are called non-business employers. The non-business employers are those who may employ alien workers but do not have to obtain a business license. These employers must state in an affidavit that they do not receive food stamp assistance, Security Supplemental Income from the Social Security Administration, government subsidies in the form of public utilities from

the Commonwealth Utilities Corp., or low income housing from the Northern Marianas Housing Corp.

Non-business employers, however, must meet the following minimum financial guidelines:

No. of persons in household	Gross Monthly Income
1	\$1,583
2	\$1,833
3	\$2,033
4	\$2,183
5	\$2,333

The Division of Labor will deny any permit applications of any non-business employers if they fail to meet such financial minimum guidelines.

Q: What will happen if a complaining worker and his or her employer do not reach an agreement?

A: If the parties do not come to an agreement, the Labor's Administrative Hearing Office shall inform the case investigator of this fact. The case investigator shall complete the investigation. The mediator then shall schedule a date for a hearing on the complaint.

Submit questions on labor issues to *Saipan Tribune* via e-mail at editor@saipantribune.com, or by calling 235-6397, 235-2440, or 235-8747 and leaving a message at Ext. 133 or 135. You may also submit questions in person by writing it down and dropping it off at the *Saipan Tribune's* office on the second floor of the Century Insurance Building on Beach Road, Garapan.

TOO LITTLE

FROM PAGE 2

out that the Mayuga report had been sanitized.

"Yes," Lacson said when asked if he had information the report had been cleansed.

"And if proven, it could blow up into something that the AFP leadership and Malacañang can't manage and control," he said.

Lacson, a former Philippine National Police chief, however, declined to say which parts of the report had been sanitized and at what level of the government this was done.

Biazon said he would formally ask for a copy of the Mayuga report and the statements of some 70 witnesses so he could use these as a take-off point for his next hearing in late May.

"I need to examine the report and the statements. How was the investigation conducted? How were the questions asked?" said Biazon, chair of the Senate committee on national defense.

Names of witnesses

The senator said he would also ask the military to give him the names of the witnesses to establish if they included military personnel who had signified their willingness to testify at the Senate inquiry but later decided not to.

"I wanted to know if the witnesses included people who had approached me, but clammed up because of what happened to Gudani and Balutan," he said.

After testifying at the Senate committee's Sept. 28 hearing, Brigadier General Francisco Gudani and Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Balutan were

subjected to court-martial proceedings for defying the President's order not to appear at the inquiry.

Gudani, who was mentioned in the Garci tapes, denied any role in election fraud and testified at the Senate that First Gentleman Jose Miguel Arroyo flew twice to Mindanao to deliver P500 million before the 2004 elections, a claim flatly denied by the President's husband.

Biazon said he would invite some of the witnesses to the next hearing and hoped that by that time, the Supreme Court would have ruled on Executive Order No. 464 which bars government officials from hearings without the President's consent.

Unless the order was lifted, there would be no closure to the scandal, he said.



MARCONI CALINDAS

GOOD FRIDAY TREK

The MOVER organization sits by the tent they set up along the route toward the peak of Mt. Ta-pochau. The group helped out by distributing free drinks and food to the hundreds of people who climbed up the mountain as part of the Good Friday tradition.

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Widow is loving mom to 60 young offenders

BY CHRISTIAN V. ESGUERRA
PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

Call him Mark. No one knows his real age, and he doesn't either.

Judging by his build, his friends under the care of the Council for Children in Conflict with the Law in Marikina City peg it at either 18 or 19.

He doesn't even know his real name.

Once he went by the name "Enteng." But that was before his parents brought him to a bus station in Pangasinan province and left him there.

He was probably about 4 then. He never saw them again.

The parent Mark and about 60 other youth offenders have come to embrace is 55-year-old Nadela Sarte, a longtime television producer now working full-time for the kids as head of the council.

The Marikina government put up the council late last year to look after the welfare of children who have run afoul of the law. It helps keep them out of jail, where the company of much older inmates won't be good for their rehabilitation.

Involvement in the advocacy is neither an act of penitence nor mortification for Nadela, a widow with two children. It's more about seeing the suffering face of Christ in these young souls society has come to dismiss as

hopeless juvenile delinquents.

"No, they're not," she protests when the Inquirer visited the place in Barangay Sta. Elena last Monday. "Just give them a home and love and they'll become productive citizens."

Easier said than done, but Nadela is driven by experience. She is no neophyte with kids, having been a producer of the defunct TV educational program "Chikiting Patrol."

Since last February, she has opened the doors of her late husband's high-walled, 400-square-meter property along C. Cruz Street to the likes of Mark. She keeps them there while they await their "release on recognizance."

Jail life

She began with 22 youth offenders and is now left with 10. The rest had been released on ROR or, unhappily for some, convicted of offenses for which they had been arrested.

Nadela was introduced to jail life when a friend invited her to see some 35 youth offenders at the Marikina jail in October 2004. She was later asked to lead a program to keep them distracted from the dark conditions behind bars.

Reluctant, she says she was challenged when she overheard one young inmate say: "We've got someone new again. Let's see how long this one will last."

"Good thing there are poor

people like us in this world," another one said. "We help keep the rich busy. And we bring them to heaven."

Crayons and Bibles

For the following Mondays without fail, Nadela would visit the group, bringing with her crayons and sketch pads, Bibles and crucifixes. Soon they were drawing and praying, and opening up to the stranger.

Their works were predominantly about prison life and their experiences in the streets. One drew a witch. He said it was his mother who had abandoned him.

The diligence paid off.

Life in tattoos

The youth offenders, guided by freelance artist Dennis Miguel, came up with an exhibit of their own in late 2004. A bigger exhibit is set at the GSIS Building on April 17.

At Nadela's house, the boys' sorry past are written all over their scarred bodies, lean frames

used as tattoo canvases during their stint at the city jail. Many of them sport colorful hair, giving them the look of someone you would never want to meet in a dark alley.

But their looks betray them—they're no hardened criminals. Their crimes, at least insofar as some are concerned, range from simple theft to cell phone snatching. Mark was jailed for stealing scrap metal.

One of them was charged with frustrated homicide for his role in a rumble.

She doesn't scare easy

Still, they're not the type who would scare Nadela away. To think that she has a pretty daughter, 22-year-old Flexi, living with her.

"I eat with them, I sleep with them. But never did I lose anything and not once did they threaten me or anything," the mother says.

If anything, it's her neighbors

who are uneasy. They fear it's just a matter of time before they see a violent jailbreak or a bloody hostage drama in the Sarte household.

Only a lone guard stationed at the gate by the local government keeps watch over the boys as a matter of procedure.

Honesty and discipline

Nadela understands her neighbors' anxiety. If only they would drop by her house and see for themselves how the teenagers are doing, she's certain their fears would be allayed.

She has realized, for instance, that there is no problem with honesty and discipline.

To keep the boys busy, she came up with a daily schedule that allotted time for prayers, exercise, and creative and household work. It's unlike in a city jail or military dormitory, where actions are numbered. One digression means punishment.

Alternating at kitchen work

on a weekly basis is a necessity considering that Nadela, a single parent since her husband Chito died in 2002, can't cook for them all the time.

Mutual love

During the Inquirer visit, Jasper, 18, was manning the kitchen, making sure that every one was getting his fair share of meatloaf and rice. Later, Mark washed the plates.

Traces of his Japanese father are in the eyes of Jasper. He has never seen him. He hasn't seen his Filipino mother for quite sometime, as well.

"That's the way things go here," Nadela says. "Even if I'm out, they know what to do. They cook their food and clean up afterward."

In their few months together, the boys have come to regard her as a doting mother. And they have been reciprocating.

John Paul, 13, finds no difficulty sitting in her lap or showing her with hugs and kisses.

Communist rebels burn bus in extortion attempt

COTABATO, Philippines (AP)

—Communist guerrillas burned a bus after forcing its passengers out at gunpoint in a southern Philippine province, in the second such attack in two weeks against a bus company which refused an extortion demand, an army spokesman said Thursday.

New People's Army guerrillas blocked the bus at dawn Wednesday on an isolated road in Salay town in Misamis Oriental province, ordered its driver and passengers out, and then set it on fire, said Lt. Col. Francisco Simbajon, spokesman of the army's 4th Infantry Division.

Nobody was hurt in the at-

tack, he said.

The rebels attacked the bus after its owners apparently refused to pay "revolutionary taxes" to the guerrillas. They burned another bus belonging to the same company in Misamis Oriental two weeks ago, Simbajon said.

Authorities have bolstered road security to deter similar attacks in the province, about 750 kilometers (465 miles) south of Manila.

The guerrillas, who are on U.S. and European Union terrorist blacklists, have been waging a rural-based Marxist rebellion for 37 years. The government has long accused the rebels of extortion and economic sabotage.



BAGUIO RETREAT

In this handout photo released by the Malacanang palace, Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, center in blue shirt, strolls with cabinet members during a Lenten retreat in the summer capital of Baguio City, northern Philippines, on Wednesday April 12, 2006.

6 sure to get National Artist award

By GIL C. CABACUNGAN JR.
and CHRISTINE AVENDANO
PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

Malacañang yesterday all but confirmed that it would be adding more names to the list of National Artist awardees this year, even as it insisted that the process of choosing the final list of recipients

was not yet complete.

In a bid to explain the snafu that followed the Palace move to withdraw the announcement of the awardees only hours after making it public the other day, Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita clarified that the conferment of the award on the six nominees, led by the late actor-director Fernando Poe Jr., would remain, denying speculations that some of the names would be taken out.

In fact, there might even be more names to be announced, which was why the announcement of the list of awardees was "premature," Ermita told reporters in Baguio City.

Cecile Guidote Alvarez, the presi-

dential adviser on culture, also said "maybe one, two, even three names" could still be added.

Yesterday, Presidential Chief of Staff Michael Defensor indicated who the additional awardee might be—Muslim sculptor and painter Abdulmari Asia Imao.

Defensor said a group of Muslim cultural groups had been clamoring for Malacañang to give a Muslim artist the National Artist Award, the highest national recognition accorded Filipinos who had made significant contributions to the arts.

He said he "accidentally sat" in on a recent Palace meeting where the Muslim clamor for Imao being recognized

was discussed and said this might be the reason Malacañang was "holding back" from announcing the final list of awardees.

Earlier on Tuesday, Malacañang released a list containing the names of six distinguished Filipino artists—Bivenido L. Lumbea (literature), Ramon A. Obusan (dance), Benedicto Cabrera (visual arts), Ildefonso P. Santos Jr., (architecture), Ramon Valera (fashion design) and Poe (film)—who will be conferred the rank and title of Order of National Artist.

Later that day, however, Palace executives scrambled to pull back the memo from public release, claiming that the list was not yet final and the

selection process was still going on.

But Ambeth Ocampo, the chair of the joint board of commissioners of the National Commission of Culture and the Arts, told the Inquirer the other day that the selection process had been completed and the list of recommended awardees had been sent to the Palace which confirmed them.

The NCCA jointly administers the awards with the Cultural Center of the Philippines. The two institutions conduct the "committee of peers" review of the candidates and make the recommendations to the President who confirms the awardees and makes the final announcement.

PINOYSTYLE

Gretchen on text spat: Bong is still calling

By **DOLLY ANNE CARVAJAL**
INQUIRER

So much has been said and been written about Gretchen Barretto's backing out of the movie she was supposed to do with Bong Revilla. It would have been La Greta's comeback vehicle. Moviegoers are dying to see the face that launched a thousand shrieks after a long, long while.

But just when it was all systems go, Gretch got wind of a text message that Bong's wife Lani Mercado sent to her close friends. The message read: "Kung ikaw si Lani, ipagkakatiwala mo ba ang asawa mong si Sen. Bong Revilla makapareha si Gretchen sa pelikula?" Naturally this didn't sit too well with Gretch so she decided to call the whole thing off. It wasn't worth the aggravation, Gretch decided, considering what a charmed life she already enjoys.

Many controversies ago, Gretch and Bong were romantically linked. But now they are both happy with their own partners so the past shouldn't be a big deal anymore. Although Lani's text makes it seem that she's still affected by the issue that has long been buried in show biz archives. Oh well... what's a wife to do if her husband is perpetually linked, right or

wrong, to so many women?

I texted both Gretch and Lani for the real score. Lani's reply: "It would be best to get Bong's statement. I sent Gretchen flowers with a card saying thank you for your kind words in Ricky's column. The text message I sent to six friends was just to solicit advice. If I have offended you, I'm sorry. Thanks for valuing our friendship. Sana 'wag na ito humaba, Dolly and may [it have a] peaceful ending."

The title of the movie is "Kapag Tumibok ang Puso (Not Once but Twice)." Lani has survived countless intrigues about Bong's "Don Juan" ways so by now she should be immune to its controversies already, huh?

And here's Gretch's text-back: "I plan to produce my own movie na lang. Nope, I didn't receive any flowers from Lani, [not] yet. Bong hasn't stopped calling and texting to apologize. I've [turned off] my cell [phone]. I need rest. Thanks, dear. Luv ya."

Knowing Gretch, she's got too much class to let inanities get the better of her.

Since it's Holy Week, may peace prevail between the two camps and may other show biz erring factions also observe a cease-fire. Don't seize the day for chika. It's Holy Tuesday. Time

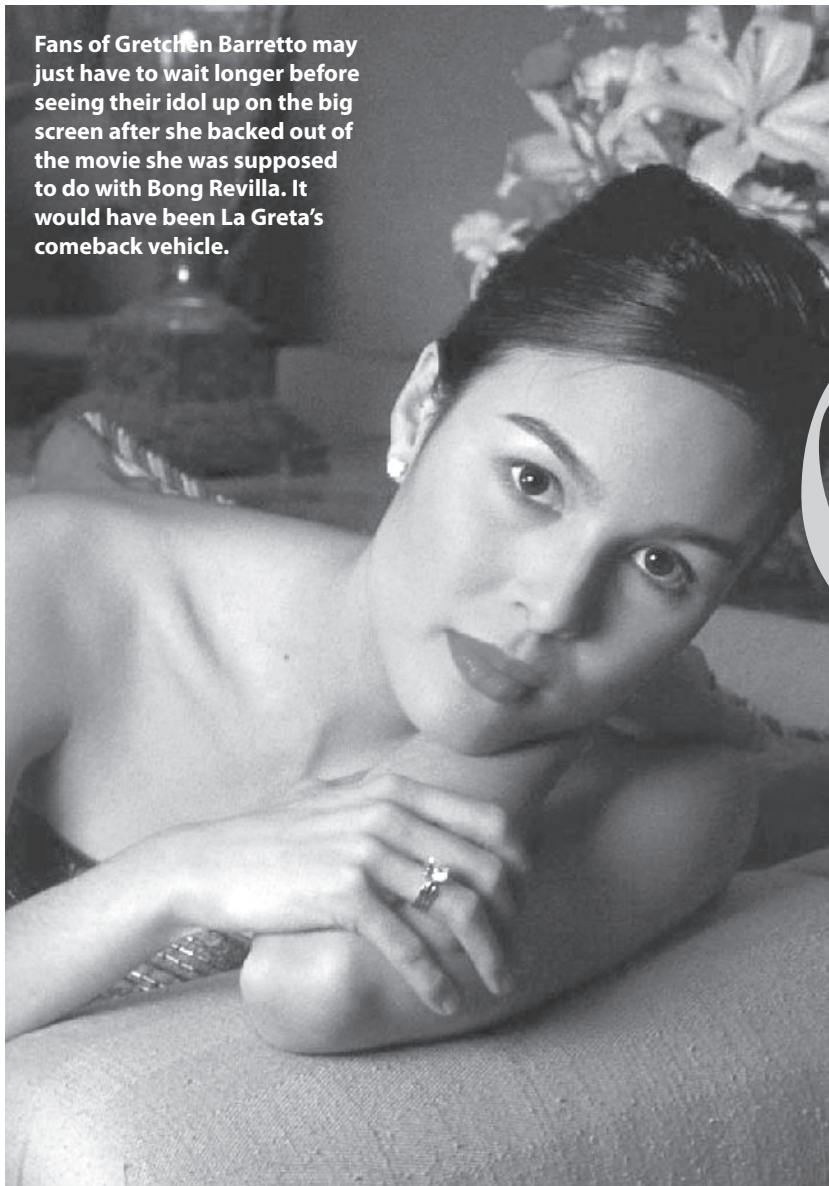
to cease the day for intrigues.

How's Direk Lino?

I texted my "sis" Sen. Pia Cayetano to ask how her brother, Direk Lino, is handling the issue about his girlfriend Bianca Gonzales and Zanjoe Marudo. The two ex-housemates got too close for comfort inside Big Brother's house. Pia replied, "I will relay your message to him. There will be a time for that."

Heard that Star Cinema is cooking up a movie for Bianca and Zanjoe. Out of delicadeza, I'm sure they won't ask Lino to direct it. If ever, the sidelights during the shooting would even be more interesting than the movie itself. That would be a movie within a movie!

Speaking of Zanjoe, is it true that he doesn't want to go back to modeling anymore? After his stint in "Pinoy Big Brother Celebrity Edition," he intends to focus on show biz instead. A colleague got turned off though when Zanjoe said that modeling is only for those who are trying to make a name because they are paid less. It seems that all the fame has gotten to his head so quickly. Has his two-month stay in Big Bro's house caused amnesia, that he has forgotten where he started? Is the former Bench model no role model after all?



Fans of Gretchen Barretto may just have to wait longer before seeing their idol up on the big screen after she backed out of the movie she was supposed to do with Bong Revilla. It would have been La Greta's comeback vehicle.

'Idol' producer leads RP team

By **BAYANI SAN DIEGO JR.**
INQUIRER

As a supervising producer of the "Idol" franchise, Briton Sheldon Bailey has seen fire and rain—and everything in between—in the four corners of the world.

"In Southeast Asia, it's very hot," she recalled. "I was in Norway, near the Arctic Circle, last December and it was minus 23. Still, the girls were in skimpy dresses! They would do anything, including travel 13 hours in ferries across fjords [to audition]!"

Massive

She's also been to strife-torn territories in the Middle East and former European communist countries.

"Idol" is massive in Eastern Europe," she said. "We have Polish, Croatian, Serbian and Russian Idols. We're everywhere. We're now in 35 countries."

Bailey and three other supervising producers in FremantleMedia are called "flying producers" because they travel all over the globe, to "coordinate and serve as consultants to the local production teams."

She has been assigned to "Philippine Idol," which premieres on ABC 5 in July.

She was in Manila last week to lay the groundwork for the local version of the hugely popular reality talent search.

Before arriving in Manila, she was in France, Portugal, Poland, Germany, Israel and Canada.

"I'm currently doing my Asian Idol tour," she told Inquirer Entertainment. "From Singapore, I flew to the Philippines and then I'll go to Indonesia."

In these countries, franchisees follow an "Idol" manual, dubbed a "bible," to the letter.

"We are very protective of the 'Idol' format because it works," she explained. "We prefer that everyone stick to the basic structure. However, within the structure, we can adapt."

She cited as examples the varying names of the series in different countries—a result of their compliance to local customs, traditions and religions.

In Arabic countries, the "Idol" show is called "Superstar" so as not to offend the Islamic faithful, she said. "We also call it 'Superstar' in Germany because the German word for 'Idol' is close to Führer."

The Arabian show "shocked people," she recounted. "Politicians debated about it in the Parliament in Jordan. Our team received death threats from the Hamas, until the Palestinian Islamist organization relented because of the show's popularity."

The countries' musical genres are also respected and highlighted in local versions.

For the "Philippine Idol," Original Pilipino Music will be showcased extensively.

Six months

"When I was in Singapore, they told me that the level of talent in the Philippines is fantastic," she recalled. "In the original 'Pop Idol' in England we had 700 hours of audition footage from three cities."

Considering the wealth of talent in the Philippines, the local production team could potentially face, "thousands of hours of footage... The team will have no lives for the next six months," she said, laughing.

Has Sandara lost her grip?

By **NINI VALERA**
INQUIRER

Sandara Park has admitted that she lost her grip on her fans when she left for Korea exactly one year ago this month for singing and dancing classes.

"When I returned, things had changed," she told Inquirer Entertainment in nearly flawless Filipino during the press conference for her latest movie, "D Lucky Ones," with real-life boyfriend Joseph Bitangcol. "ASAP," fans used to carry posters proclaiming their support for me. Now, I'm happy to see just one."

She vowed to do everything to regain lost ground. "I am now using [even] my body to get back there," she said, half in jest. "If you want to see me in a bikini... watch the movie."

Peculiar

As a contestant in ABS-CBN's "Star Circle Quest" on ABS-CBN in 2004, Sandara had inched her way to popularity with her peculiar behavior, quaint accent and straightforward chatter. She made no effort to conceal her desire to become a star.

Teamed up with Hero Angeles, who had won the search, Sandara might have been the network's new star in the tradition of Vilma Santos or Nora Aunor. But the love team soured; she fell in love with Joseph. And then she left at the height of her popularity.

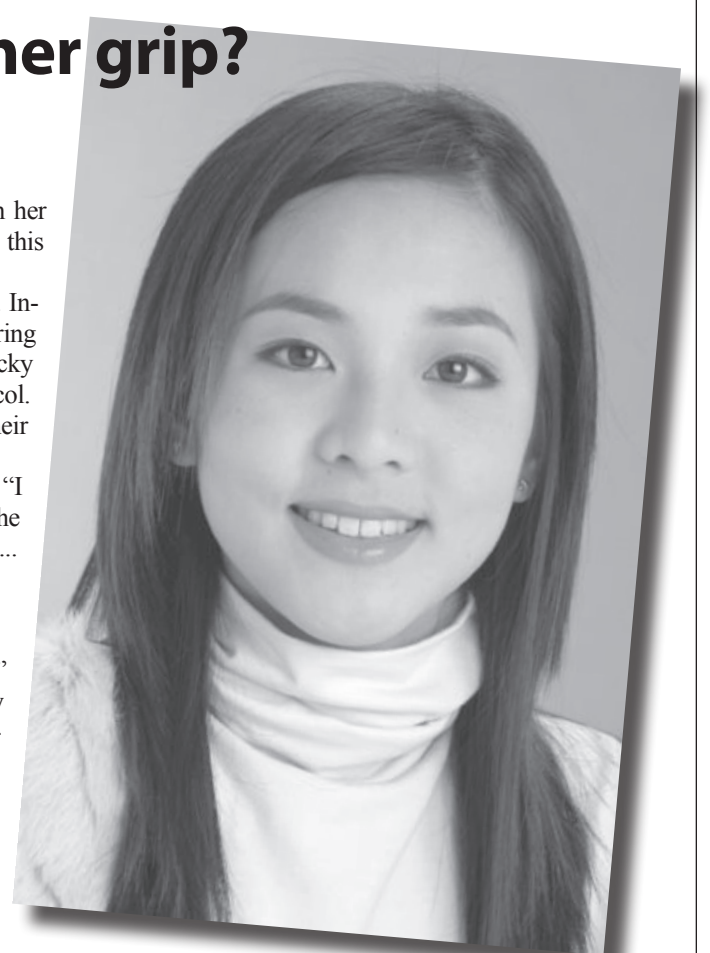
Where she used to endorse a slew of product lines—from writing instruments to a skin care line—now, she lamented, "I have only one endorsement left."

Even so, her new movie's director, Wen Deramas, predicted that Sandara would go far. "She's good in both comedy and drama," said Deramas, "and that's rare."

And she never complains, Deramas said. "She's a hard worker."

Repackaged

Joey Javier Reyes agrees. In an earlier interview, Reyes,



who directed Sandara in Hero's starrer, "Can This Be Love," said she would do anything the script asked for.

"She would fall into a ditch, jump off a cliff, things like that," said Reyes. "She's determined to succeed."

Indeed, success the second time around may be within Sandara's grasp. She has repackaged her Star Records CD to include the song, "Ang Ganda Ko." She has kept her cool, despite the difficult comeback. And she has retained her trademark candor.

OUT OF THE CLOSET

Art, jewelry and the single girl

By **MARINEL R. CRUZ**
PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

Actress and commercial model Heart Evangelista's ultimate dream is to hold an art exhibit some day.

Not many people know that the chinky-eyed beauty has been sketching and painting since she was young. As a matter of fact, Heart, 21, had to be pulled away from watching TV for this interview. Being shown on HBO on the afternoon of Inquirer Entertainment's visit was James Ivory's "Surviving Picasso," with Anthony Hopkins playing the role of the late artist Pablo Picasso.

"I like painting girls," Heart said in an interview at her Makati City home. "But [the other aspects] depend on my frame of mind. I paint colorful pictures when I'm happy. I use gloomy colors when I'm sad."

The actress says it's somewhat like dressing up. "When I feel bad, I dress up. A good pair of shoes and a really nice bag can boost one's confidence."

Art Pieces

"This picture of myself was the first painting after Echo (Jericho Rosales, her boyfriend and co-star in 'Panday') and I got together. This is really special to me. I was very happy when I painted this.

"On my sketchpad is a pencil picture of Echo's bandmate, Dan. I drew it at the beach; that's why it's very blue.

"I also drew this picture of my makeup artist, Yolly. I made her sit still for a while. Biglaan lang ito."

Book

"Right now, I'm reading Stormie Omartian's "Just Enough Light for the Step I'm On." It's the perfect book for a baby Christian like me."

Dresses

"This white sequined chiffon dress is from Singapore. It's got this Bollywood look that I really like. I've not used this here, but I've worn it to the wedding of a famous wushu trainer in Singapore. Since the fabric is really thin, I wore a skin-toned camisole underneath.

"I bought this dress in Hong Kong after a shoot. It's really during last-minute shopping spree that I get to buy things that I like. This one is very proper, very respectable.

"This Betsey Johnson dress is from

San Francisco (shows a bronze-colored satin dress with pink embroidery). It's very versatile. I can wear it on a regular day or during a formal occasion. All I have to do is change my shoes.

"I asked Oscar dela Renta to make this light brown evening gown for me. He's one of my favorite designers. I wore this for a Guillermo Mendoza Memorial Awards show. I plan to wear it again."

Tops

"I got this white embroidered halter top during my trip to Hawaii in February. I love its color and bohemian look. I like the way it hangs on my body—not too tight but not too loose, either.

"My favorite T-shirt says: 'I love my bag and dog.' This T-shirt says it all about me. I really love my dogs, even though I have asthma."

Jeans And Skirts

"I hardly wear jeans. I don't know why it's so hard for me to find the right pair. That's why when I got hold of this Ultra-low rise from Gap, I couldn't let go.

"On the other hand, I'm a skirt and shorts lover. I like them in denim fabric. I get most of them from Top Shop and Zara. Not only are they comfy, they're also very stylish."

Shoes

"My current favorite is a pair of white high-heeled slip-ons from Gucci. I could wear it with almost anything. It's great during summer. This is only a month old.

"My black Prada pair is a gift from Echo. I call them my outstanding black heels. I saw this at the Prada store in Greenbelt. I wanted to get them for myself but he insisted on buying for me. I was experiencing one of the most difficult times in my life when Echo gave this to me. There was this negative talk going around ... Echo said this should remind me to keep walking proudly.

"This pair of brown boots was very hard to find. It took me a whole day of walking through the busy streets of

Hong Kong. It's made of soft leather and the style is unique.

"MKNY provides most of my slippers and sneakers. This pair of slippers is very comfy. I use it whenever I'm on the set of 'Panday.' I wear rubber shoes when I want to go really casual, 'yung walang pakialam."

Bags

"I love bags, like this one black leather number from Dior, though I don't use it often. I save it for very special events. I feel it attracts too much attention.

"The one I use frequently is this blue leather Luis Vuitton. It can go with anything, especially jeans. Another favorite is this brown Luella bag that I got in San Francisco. I think this brand is not sold locally yet. I first saw this from Hollywood actresses Sarah Jessica Parker and Sienna Miller.

"I'm guilty of spending a lot on bags. I made a promise to Tita Angeli that I won't buy any more bags—even though they're tax deductible. To girls who love bags but are on a tight budget, make sure you get sturdy ones. That way, you don't have to buy a lot. Guess and Girbaud are not too expensive."

Accessories

"I first found this butterfly wings costume in one of the studios of ABS-CBN. I wore it to a Halloween party. I returned it and then found it again in the dressing room of Myx. It stayed there for almost a year. Nobody seemed to want it, so I took it home.

"Echo gave me a silver charm bracelet from Roxy. Isn't it cute? It has a matching silver necklace with a heart-shaped pendant.

"I only use most of the watches I have here for shows. The one that's really special to me is this silver analog watch from Mont Blanc. Big watches are in fashion again. I got this in Singapore. (Heart heaves a loud sigh.) It's a gift. Period.

"I really like jewelry. My favorite is a gold ring studded with diamonds. I got attracted to the flower design. Another favorite ring is made from a semi-precious

tossed coins of appreciation.

Another has to do with curtains being referred to as "legs," so a broken leg meant that the curtain would have worn out from overuse over multiple curtain calls.

No whistling backstage. Legend says don't do it, misfortune will follow. Where it comes from: sailors often ran the fly loft in theaters and they used whistles as cue signals. Someone's absentminded tune could bring a backdrop or curtain in at the wrong time—or, worse, down on someone's head.

No peanuts. Because chewed peanut bits could lodge in an actor's throat, make him cough, and ruin the delivery of his lines.

Other superstitious beliefs

Never wear blue onstage. This comes



Actress and commercial model Heart Evangelista's ultimate dream is to hold an art exhibit some day.

stone. Its band is studded with diamonds. It reminds me of the ocean.

"To girls who are just beginning to buy jewelry, be careful with the diamonds that you pick. It's not the size that matters; it's the brilliance."

Sleep Wear

"I got this night dress from Woman's Secret. I actually wore this on a night out once. I was on a trip and ran out of clothes.

"Sometimes, I wear boxers and tank tops to bed. Sometimes, I wear big T-shirts, especially when I feel like I'm coming down with a cold or a fever."

Swim Wear

"My favorites are those I got from BCBG in the States. They're very flat-

tering, especially to girls like me who don't have big boobs. They're very stylish, too. What I wear to the beach depends on what I plan to do there. If I just want to get a tan, I wear these strapless brassieres."

Scents

"I wear different scents everyday. I like Gucci Envy, L Occitane Green Tea, Miracle by Lancome, DKNY Be Delicious and Baby Doll by Yves Saint Lauren. But I've been using this brand, Gian Franco Ferre, for more than six years now. It's pretty strong, but the scent really really lasts. This is my signature scent.

"When I'm too immune and I can't smell myself anymore, that's when I change scents."

Origins of theater world's superstitious beliefs

By **NESTOR U. TORRE**
INQUIRER

Why do stage people whisper "Break a leg" to each other before a performance? Why are peanuts a no-no backstage? Why are actors instructed not to whistle before and during a performance?

More generally, why are there so many superstitious beliefs attached to the theater? Director John Caird has studied the matter thoroughly, poring through old sourcebooks to unearth the "practical" origins of

those "beliefs."

So, stage buffs, now you know:

"Break a leg." The legend says actors should wish each other good luck this way, since to actually say "Good luck" might tempt malicious spirits to deliver the opposite.

Historically, however, one explanation is that the theater tradition of wishing colleagues to "break a leg" derived from actors who would bend at the knee, or break the line of the leg, to take a bow, or to pick up

from Renaissance times, when indigo was a pricey dye, and any troupe that would lavish money on such a frivolous aspect of the production was not likely to be profitable.

No peacock feathers. Legend says those quills can kill. Where it comes from: The patterns on the feather too closely resembles the evil eye, a portent of terrible consequences, including death.

Caird debunks the belief that Shakespeare's "Macbeth" is an "unlucky" play, and that people staging it will be "cursed."

Finally, he reveals why some actors don't want to utter the final line of a play in rehearsals: "Old theater troupes didn't want their play to feel entirely finished until opening night. Only then could the last line be finally spoken."

Some of these superstitious beliefs hold sway in local theater. But they can't hold a candle to the even more florid superstitious notions that rule the local movie scene.

Through the years, we've met producers who don't start shooting their movies on an "inauspicious" date, or when there's a full moon.

Others make it a point not to use the word "itim" in their movie's titles, believing it to be "malas."

And, some stars are regarded as unlucky after their movies flop, so producers stop casting them in their new films.

It's all very subjective, of course, but some producers take it seriously, so the hapless stars who are deemed to be "bad luck" have to bear with the superstitious belief's sad and unjust consequences.

OPINYON

Faith

I can understand some of the complaints about *The Da Vinci Code*, which have become a little more strident as the movie looms. Movies being the more popular fare, Christians, or indeed Catholics, are a little more alarmed at the harm it can do to their faith. I myself have gotten text messages from acquaintances asking me to aid them in their campaign against the movie.

I'm afraid I can't do that. I enjoyed the book thoroughly—it helped me get through the long flight from Manila to Barcelona, itself an exercise of faith that metal could float in air. And I'm a great fan of some of the people involved in the movie. Dreamworks has produced some pretty dreamy works, and you can't go wrong with Tom Hanks. Jean Reno I like immensely, though he's a little more roller-coaster, rising to great heights in French movies and sinking to absolute lows in Hollywood ones. They should do a fine job with the book.

But like I said, I can understand some of the complaints. As Christian scholars aplenty have pointed out, the historical inaccuracies in *The Da Vinci Code* are legion. Never mind Brown's reinterpretation of Da Vinci's famous painting "The Last Supper," where Da Vinci presumably shows Christ being seated next to Mary Magdalene, who is his wife. (Though I did look for the painting after I read the book and was astonished to find that the person seated next to Christ truly looked like a woman!) Mind only that Brown ascribes to Constantine the fiat turning Jesus from an ordinary mortal into a divine being and the (quite literal) witch hunts the Church mounted against women in particular to obliterate all pagan beliefs, which extolled the sacred "feminine." Those things, the scholars fulminate, simply did not happen. There is no shred of evidence to support it. Which can't be excused simply by saying Brown's work is fiction.

I'll leave the historians, secular and religious,

to debate the point. But if there is no shred of evidence to support the contention about Constantine's unilateral decision to confer divinity upon Christ and to mount a bloody pogrom against those who thenceforth challenged it, there is at least more than a shred of evidence to support the vicious way Christendom sought to enforce its hegemony over other faiths. It was no less vicious than the way the Islamic empire throughout its centuries of rule sought to stamp out infidels from the face of the earth.

The Name of the Rose, Umberto Eco's far more brilliant and entertaining literary achievement, in part shows so. It has long chapters about the Inquisition, and how it employed torture to solicit unconditional belief from the faithful—or the fearful. More to the point, the late great John Paul II did completely factually and historically apologize to the Muslims for Christianity's crimes against civilization during the Crusades, and to the world of science and reason for its persecution of Galileo. To this day, you have people like Pat Robertson and his sponsors at the White House commandeering the name of the Christian God to wreak havoc upon the world. If the spirit of Brown's criticism, if not its letter, were largely nonsense, Church officials would not be particularly bothered by it.

Faith is a tricky business. I remember again the person who told me he belonged to the Couples for Christ and had no desire to read *The Da Vinci Code* because he did not want to lose his faith, or question it. I don't know how representative he is of Filipino



There's The Rub

By **CONRADO DE QUIROS**
PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

It was no less vicious than the way the Islamic empire throughout its centuries of rule sought to stamp out infidels from the face of the earth.

In the line of duty

When President Diosdado Macapagal commissioned Guillermo Tolentino to sculpt the busts of Filipino heroes for the newly renamed Heroes Hall (previously the Social Hall), among the heroes chosen was Jose Abad Santos. Today, Abad Santos is commemorated on the P1,000-bill along with two other martyrs of the Japanese Occupation, Josefa Llanes Escoda and Gen. Vicente Lim. While officially, homage continues to be given to Abad Santos, the anniversary of his capture by the Japanese on April 10, 1942 and his execution on May 2 of that year are largely ignored and the importance of the man is only vaguely understood.

Abad Santos was captured by the Japanese near Carcar, Cebu. He was interrogated for three weeks, and asked to contact soldiers who hadn't surrendered and to renounce his allegiance to the United States and the Philippines. He refused, saying: "I cannot accede to the things you ask of me. To obey your commands is tantamount to being a traitor to the United States and my country. I would prefer to die rather than live in shame."

Abad Santos was brought to Parang, Cotabato, and then to Malabang, Lanao del Sur, where he was told he would be executed. When his son burst into tears

upon being told this, Abad Santos said, "Do not cry Pepito. Show these people that you are brave. It is a rare opportunity for me to die for our country. Not everybody is given that chance."

At two o'clock in the afternoon of May 2, 1942, he was executed. His remains have never been found.

Present-day Filipinos, who have grown up free, find it difficult to understand how exactly Abad Santos became a Filipino hero when he died as much out of loyalty to the United States as to his country. After all, with an official history that accepts both the Second Republic established by the Japanese and the Commonwealth that continued in exile, who can say either side was good or nobler than the other?

The answer was given by Jose P. Laurel himself, who justified his assumption of a de facto presidency out of loyalty to the de jure leadership of the country. In a private discussion on Jan. 6, 1944, Laurel reminisced about events that occurred in December 1941: "I still recall those last Cabinet meetings in Marikina. We were there under the mango tree near the air-raid shelter. Don Manuel [Quezon] put up before the Cabinet the order he just received from Washington commanding him to go to Corregidor."

"In justice to him, I want to say that the President didn't want to leave. But

it was us, the Cabinet, including me, that influenced him. I still remember him saying, 'Laurel, write my letter and explain why I should not go.' And I wrote that the people would not understand the President's act of leaving for Corregidor during a crucial period. It would be like running away, I wrote. The same thing that is being said of him now.

"But finally, the decision was made that he should go. Then he informed us ... that he would also take me along. I was ready to go..."

"Finally at the last minute, the President changed his mind and said he would bring Jose Abad Santos instead. 'You Laurel,' he said, 'are influential with the Japanese. They have given you a doctorate. So, stay and help Jorge [Vargas].'"

"And so I stayed..."

Laurel also wrote in his prison memoirs that it could just as easily have been him in Abad Santos' shoes and that he would have appreciated the chance to die gloriously for his country more than endure the painful duty of being an occupation president.

Catholics. I have friends as well possessed of deep religious convictions who enjoyed the book and look forward to the movie. In politics as in religion, it's those who are confident of their convictions who do not particularly mind them being put to the test. On the other hand, it's those who cling tenuously to beliefs out of desperation or need who are so scared of losing them.

The furor about the *Da Vinci Code*, book or movie, does raise an interesting point about faith. Which is that if some of Brown's contentions can be questioned on historical grounds, can't the same things be said of the Catholic Church's as well? Unlike Paul of Tarsus, the most influential articulator of the Christian faith next to Christ himself, Christ's utterances cannot be historically ascertained. That is not to speak of the miracles attributed to him, which are even more problematic. Unlike Mohammad or Buddha who are regarded by Muslims and Buddhists as prophets or sages, Christ is regarded by Christians as a God. That is no small contention, and I don't know that there is historical proof of the resurrection. In the end, what you really have, if you believe that, is faith. A leap of reasoning that can only be made in the heart and not in the head.

Which brings me to: But what is faith really?

I would imagine that its validity or value lies in what you become as a result of it. If Christianity or Islam merely turns you into a murderous fanatic ready to smite your neighbor simply because he does not share your ironclad conviction that Christ or Allah is the one true God, then I don't know that faith is worth having at all. I can only imagine, along with John Lennon, all the people living life in peace without country and religion too. But if faith fills your soul with joy and laughter, if faith causes you to espy the divine spark in the wonders of everyday life, especially in the greatest wonder of all, which is the human creation, if faith makes you tolerant and generous as your God bids you become, then maybe that is all the proof of God you need. In that case, I can only ask, along with Joan Osborne, "What if God was one of us?"

And answer: "Well, if he was, he'd probably watch *Da Vinci Code*, The Movie, and have a good laugh."



The Long View

By **MANUEL L. QUEZON III**
PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

Why Abad Santos chose to die might best be understood by recalling the responsibilities he held at the time of his capture. He was more than chief justice and concurrent justice secretary (because of the emergency powers act which gave Quezon quasi-legislative emergency powers passed by the Philippine legislature after the Japanese attack). Abad Santos had also been designated the representative of the President of the Philippines in unoccupied territory. To show that he was indeed the representative of the President, up to the time he was captured, he would ride in a car bearing license plate No. 1. Thus, for Abad Santos to order

Filipino soldiers still resisting to surrender would have carried the moral, if not political weight, of the commander in chief who had delegated to him the powers of his office. Any overt cooperation with the Japanese would also have been tantamount to the surrender of the Commonwealth government. At the very least, the harm to the country's cause would have been magnified beyond the actual reality of the capture

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Merry-go-round

The Philippines and Filipinos have been riding on a merry-go-round year after year, but the ride has never been merry for the majority. No matter who is in power, the economy gets worse, and only the politicians and their cohorts benefit. Many have given up in frustration and packed up to seek sanity elsewhere. Some have even traded their superior educational background for more stable menial jobs overseas.

Here in the Greater Washington area, "the Washington Connection" (as the Washington Woman magazine calls it) is composed of Filipino domestics who are much sought-after and jealously guarded by their bosses. They are even enticed and "pirated" by wealthy (and sometimes less-educated) employers by offering higher salaries.

Indeed, the rulers of our country have driven good people away. Many of our nurses and doctors have abandoned the Philippines and their talents benefit other countries instead of their own.

What is wrong? Sociologist Randy David has done research on the answers and should be given the opportunity to apply his findings to finally get the country moving forward. I will take up dual citizenship to be able to vote him into office if he ever runs.

Josie Lim Cruz
Maryland, USA
via e-mail

of a chief justice. Abad Santos saw this clearly, and to the end, he did his duty without flinching or displaying any anxiety.

There is a line of civilian martyrs in our modern nationhood: Jose Rizal, Jose Abad Santos, Ninoy Aquino. Writing of Ninoy, the late Teodoro M. Locsin Sr. reflected on Abad Santos' example:

"Here is a mystery of human nature that defies solution while humbling us. Evil we know, and understand, knowing our nature. But good is something else. As martyrdom, it has had, history shows, a fascination for some. The cynic would say it is mere inflation of the ego. But how explain the slow martyrdom of Damien who lived among lepers, ministering to their needs, and finding a mystical fulfillment when he could say: 'We lepers.' Ego-inflation still? If that is the supreme desire, then the cynic might try life in a leper colony. He should never think more highly of himself then. But cynicism is only fear—fear of knowing what one is. To debase the good is to rise in self-estimation. If all men are vile, then you are not worse than you might think you are. You just know the human score. To face and recognize goodness is to sit in judgment on oneself. Avoid it."

SAMU'T SARI

Mt. Tapochau Good Friday trek

Different Filipino organizations helped out during yesterday's Good Friday walk up Mt. Tapochau, providing drinks, snacks, and encouragement to all trekkers.



BICOL ASSOCIATION



CNMI POWER INC.



UNITED FILIPINO ORGANIZATIONS



PILCOA INC.

Members of the newly-organized non-profit organization Pilipino Contract Worker's Association, or PILCOA INC., pose for a souvenir picture after the election of a new set of officers and board members. Group president is Ronnie Doca, center with notebook, while Eli Mindanao is the vice president. The group was organized on April 6, 2006 at 13th Fishermen pavilion.



BREAK TIME

POWER INC. a non-profit organization composed of Filipino contract workers, pose during a Sunday meeting at Beach Road, Garapan. Group president is Cesar Calalang, standing left, while chairman is Lito Estoqui, second left.



NEW MOVER OFFICERS

The Multi-Sectoral Overseas Filipino Workers Inc., or MOVER, held oath-taking of officers and board of directors for the year 2006-2007 on April 9, 2006 at the Philippine Overseas Labor Office. The newly elected president is Marites A. Castillo, left, vice president-internal is Gloria Ebbay, second from left, and Philippine cosul Belinda M. Ante, third from left.



CHOW TIME

Joanne Orosco, middle, gets ready for chow time during her fun-filled 7th birthday party held recently at Aliviera Restaurant in Garapan. Also in the photo is Joanne's sister, Janet Orosco, and friend Marc Christian de la Torre.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO